

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data identifies an  
3 item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and  
4 determining a reward for the potential buyer based on the intent data.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:  
2 receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:  
2 receiving a payment identifier that identifies an electronic currency.
- 1 4. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:  
2 issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and  
3 applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer if the potential  
4 buyer does not purchase the item within the particular time period.
- 1 5. The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of:  
2 calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a value of the  
3 reward.
- 1 6. The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty comprises the  
2 steps of:  
3 receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the  
4 particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;  
5 and  
6 applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer, wherein  
7 the partial penalty is less than a total penalty charged when the potential buyer fails to  
8 purchase the item within the particular time period.

1 7. The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty to the potential  
2 buyer comprises the steps of:  
3 receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the  
4 particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;  
5 and  
6 applying a partial penalty to the financial account.

1 8. The method of claim 1, wherein the intent data received from the potential buyer  
2 includes a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
3 within the particular time period.

1 9. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:  
2 receiving a confirmation when the potential buyer has purchased the item within  
3 the particular time period.

1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the particular time period is specified by at least  
2 one of the potential buyer and a central server.

1 11. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving a description of an item a potential buyer intends to purchase within a  
3 particular time period, the description having a degree of specificity;  
4 receiving a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase  
5 the item within the particular time period;  
6 receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer;  
7 determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on at least one of the  
8 degree of specificity, the degree of certainty, and a length of the particular time period;  
9 and  
10 outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer.

1 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

2 receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the  
3 item within the particular time period.

1 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether the confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer  
3 has purchased the item within the particular time period has been received; and  
4 applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer when the  
5 potential buyer has not purchased the item within the particular time period.

1 14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:  
2 calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a  
3 reward associated with the reward offer.

1 15. The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of certainty is monotonically related  
2 to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of certainty corresponds to a  
3 greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of certainty corresponds to a lower valued  
4 reward offer.

1 16. The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of specificity is monotonically  
2 related to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of specificity corresponds  
3 to a greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of specificity corresponds to a lower  
4 valued reward offer.

1 17. The method of claim 11, wherein the particular time period is monotonically  
2 related to a value of the reward offer, such that a smaller time period corresponds to a  
3 greater valued reward offer and a greater time period corresponds to a lower valued  
4 reward offer.

1 18. The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether the potential buyer accepts the reward offer; and

3           issuing the reward to the potential buyer if the potential buyer accepts the reward  
4   offer.

1   19.    The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2           receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the  
3   item after the particular time period; and  
4           applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   20.    The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2           receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased  
3   within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to  
4   purchase; and  
5           applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   21.    The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2           receiving a confirmation signal after the particular time period indicating that the  
3   potential buyer purchased the item within the particular time period; and  
4           applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   22.    The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:  
2           receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased  
3   within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to  
4   purchase; and  
5           updating a database to indicate that no penalty has been applied to the financial  
6   account of the potential buyer.

1   23.    A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2           determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an  
3   item within a particular time period;  
4           retrieving an applicable penalty from a penalty database; and

5 applying the applicable penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 24. A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2 determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an  
3 item within a particular time period;  
4 calculating a penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a  
5 reward offered to the potential buyer in exchange for the obligation to purchase the item  
6 within the particular time period; and  
7 applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 25. A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:  
2 (a) determining whether a particular time period in which a potential buyer  
3 intends to purchase an item has expired;  
4 (b) repeating step (a) until the particular time period has expired;  
5 (c) calculating a penalty; and  
6 (d) applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1 26. The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of:  
2 (e) receiving a confirmation signal indicating the potential buyer has  
3 purchased the item after the particular time period has expired; and  
4 (f) refunding a portion of the penalty to the financial account.

1 27. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:  
2 receiving intent data from a potential buyer;  
3 generating a reward offer associated with a reward for the potential buyer based  
4 upon the intent data; and  
5 issuing the reward to the potential buyer.

1 28. The method of claim 27, wherein the intent data includes at least a description of  
2 an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period.

1 29. The method of claim 27, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer  
2 within a particular time period but before the potential buyer purchases the item.

1 30. A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:

2 (a) receiving intent data from a potential buyer intending to purchase an item  
3 within a particular time period;

4 (b) associating a financial account with the potential buyer;

5 (c) determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on a value of the  
6 intent data;

7 (d) outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer;

8 (e) determining whether the potential buyer accepts the offer;

9 (f) modifying the offer if the potential buyer rejects the offer;

10 (g) repeating steps (d) through (f) until the potential buyer accepts the offer;

11 (h) issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and

12 (i) receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer has  
13 purchased the item corresponding to the intent data.

1 31. The method of claim 30, wherein the intent data includes one or more of a  
2 potential buyer identifier, a description of the item and a degree of certainty with which  
3 the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time period.

1 32. The method of claim 30, wherein the value of the intent data is based in part on  
2 one or more of a degree of specificity of a description of the item, a degree of certainty  
3 with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time  
4 period, a length of the particular time period, and a reputation rating of the potential  
5 buyer.

1 33. The method of claim 30, wherein value of the intent data is based in part on the  
2 reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:

3 a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;

4 a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within  
5 particular time periods;

6 a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously confirmed purchases  
7 within particular time periods;

8 a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties,

9 types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

10 cost of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

11 a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and

12 a value of demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1 34. The method of claim 33, wherein demographic information includes at least one of  
2 address, income and age.

1 35. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of:  
2 determining whether the confirmation signal is valid; and  
3 applying a penalty to the financial account if the confirmation signal is invalid.

1 36. The method of claim 35, wherein the step of determining whether the  
2 confirmation signal is valid includes one or more of the steps of:  
3 verifying a potential buyer identifier;  
4 determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular  
5 time period; and  
6 determining whether the new item purchased by the potential buyer is related to  
7 the item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1 37. The method of claim 35, wherein the penalty is calculated based on a value of the  
2 reward.

1 38. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of updating a database to  
2 reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1 39. The method of claim 30, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer by  
2 shipping the reward to an address specified by the potential buyer.

1 40. A method of storing information reflecting that a confirmation signal has been  
2 received from a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:  
3 receiving an identifier of the potential buyer intending to purchase an item within  
4 a particular time period;  
5 receiving the confirmation signal from the potential buyer indicating the potential  
6 buyer has purchased the item;  
7 validating the confirmation signal; and  
8 updating a database to reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1 41. The method of claim 40, wherein the step of validating the confirmation signal  
2 includes at least one of:  
3 verifying the potential buyer identifier;  
4 determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular  
5 time period; and  
6 determining whether the item purchased by the potential buyer is the same as the  
7 item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1 42. A method for rewarding a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:  
2 offering a reward to a potential buyer for inputting a description of an item the  
3 potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and  
4 issuing the reward after the description is input.

1 43. An apparatus for identifying potential buyers, comprising:  
2 a central server coupled to one or more input devices for receiving intent data  
3 from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes a description of an item the  
4 potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period,



5           the central server operable to determine a reward for the potential buyer based on  
6   the intent data.

1   44.    The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2   server for storing the description of the item the potential buyer intends to purchase and  
3   related information.

1   45.    The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one  
2   of:

3           a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
4   within the particular time period;

5           a degree of specificity with which the item is described;

6           a length of the particular time period;

7           a payment identifier;

8           a reputation of the potential buyer; and

9           demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1   46.    The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information is based in part on the  
2   reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:

3           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;

4           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within  
5   particular time periods;

6           a frequency with which the central server has received confirmation signals  
7   associated with a potential buyer;

8           a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties;

9           types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

10          costs of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

11          a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and

12          a value of demographic information of the potential buyer

1 47. The method of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one of  
2 address, income and age.

1 48. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2 server for storing intent data used to calculate the reward to issue to the potential buyer.

1 49. The apparatus of claim 48, wherein the reward is determined based in part on a  
2 rating assigned to each of a plurality of intent data, the intent data including at least one  
3 of:

4 a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
5 within the particular time period;

6 a degree of specificity with which the item is described;

7 a length of the particular time period;

8 a payment identifier; and

9 demographic information.

1 50. The apparatus of claim 49, wherein a sum of the ratings corresponds to the reward  
2 for which the potential buyer qualifies.

1 51. The apparatus of claim 43 further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2 server for storing a plurality of rewards.

1 52. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2 server for storing a potential buyer identifier and related information.

1 53. The apparatus of claim 52, wherein the related information comprises one or more  
2 of a payment identifier and a potential buyer name.

1 54. The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central  
2 server for storing a potential buyer identifier and penalty information.

1 55. The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes one or more  
2 of a reward identifier, an expiration of the particular time period, whether a confirmation  
3 signal has been received indicating that the potential buyer has purchased the item, and a  
4 penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the reward.

1 56. The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes an expiration  
2 of the particular time period and a penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the  
3 reward.

1 57. A central server system, comprising:  
2 a processor;  
3 a storage device coupled to the processor; and  
4 software operative to run on the processor to issue a reward to a potential buyer in  
5 exchange for demand information, the demand information including at least a  
6 description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time  
7 period.

1 58. The system of claim 57, wherein the demand information includes at least one of:  
2 a potential buyer name;  
3 a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item  
4 within the particular time period;  
5 a degree of specificity with which the item is described;  
6 a length of the particular time period;  
7 a payment identifier, a reputation of the potential buyer; and  
8 demographic information associated with the buyer.

1 59. The system of claim 57, wherein the storage device includes a database for storing  
2 the demand information and related information.

1 60. The system of claim 59, wherein the related information includes a corresponding  
2 rating for each type of demand information.

1 61. The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor  
2 for storing a reward identifier and related information.

1 62. The system of claim 61, wherein the related information includes a total rating  
2 corresponding to the demand information and the reward identifier, and a reward  
3 description corresponding to the reward identifier.

1 63. The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor  
2 for storing penalty information and related information.

1 64. The system of claim 63, wherein the related information includes at least one of:  
2 a payment identifier of the potential buyer;  
3 an expiration time of the particular time period; and  
4 a corresponding penalty.

1 65. The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2 charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment  
3 identifier of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does not purchase the item by the  
4 expiration time.

1 66. The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2 charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment  
3 identifier of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is not received by the expiration  
4 time.

1 67. The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more potential buyer devices  
2 coupled to the processor and operable to allow potential buyers to input demand  
3 information.

1 68. The system of claim 67, wherein the potential buyer devices are operable to  
2 display information about the reward.

1 69. The system of claim 57, further comprising an output device for displaying  
2 information about the reward.

1 70. The system of claim 57, wherein the processor is coupled to a clock, a  
2 communications port, an input device and an output device, and wherein the storage  
3 device contains a demand information database, a reward database, and a penalty  
4 database.

1 71. The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2 charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is  
3 not received within the particular time period.

1 72. The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to  
2 charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does  
3 not purchase the item within the particular time period.

1 73. The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more seller devices coupled to  
2 the controller and operable to allow sellers to retrieve demand information.

1 74. A computer readable medium for directing a processor to perform the method of  
2 claim 1.

1 75. An information transmission medium for use in a potential buyer identification  
2 system, the information transmission medium transmitting a computer program  
3 comprising the processing steps of:  
4 receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at  
5 least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular  
6 time period; and  
7 determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.

1 76. A computer data signal representative of controller instructions comprising the  
2 processing steps of:  
3 receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at  
4 least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular  
5 time period; and  
6 determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.